

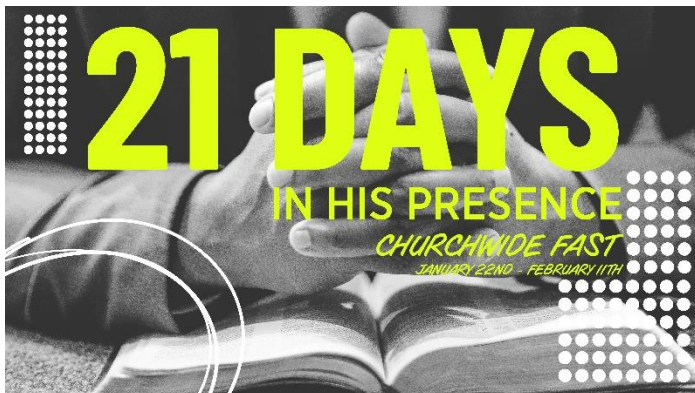
# Welcome to 21 Days of Fasting, Bible Reading and Prayer.

You're invited to join Union Church in as we begin the New Year with 21 days of Fasting, Bible Reading, and Prayer. We encourage you to involve the whole family during this time of humbling ourselves before the Lord.

## **How this works.**

Over the next 21 days you are encouraged to fast for one meal of your choice, study the Bible for 21 minutes, and to pray for 21 minutes.

This handout is broken up into three sections: Fasting, Bible Reading, and Prayer to help guide you on your journey. We're so excited that you're joining us!



# 21 Days of Fasting

## **What is a fast?**

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is taught in the Bible. Jesus expected his followers to fast, and He said that God rewards fasting. Fasting, according to the Bible, means to voluntarily reduce or eliminate our intake of food for a specific time and purpose. Be intentional to use your time and emotional margin to feed your soul while you are not feeding your stomach.

God calls us to deny ourselves, to pick up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). He tells us that hardship will inevitably come (Romans 8:35-39). Fasting gives us the spiritual backbone to lean into the Lord, even when we are uncomfortable.

## **Why do we fast?**

One of the values of Union Church is Growing People Change. One of the five characteristics under that value is regularly fasting to renew our hearts for God's will.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is mentioned in the Bible over 50 times. God's people, in both the Old and New Testaments, fasted as a way to cry out to God, seek His favor, humble themselves before Him, and pray for others, to name a few. We fast because Jesus fasted. In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus went into the wilderness to fast. In chapter 6, He gives instructions on how God's people are supposed to behave when fasting. Those who follow Jesus, desire to live a life modeled after His. We follow His example of fasting and the examples of the leaders of the early church.

## **How do we fast?**

From January 22 – February 11, we are encouraging you to fast from one meal a day, which meal is up to you. The objective of the fast is to deny your body of what it longs for in order to spend more time in prayer and connection to God.

\* Fast only if your health allows it currently. If you are only able to fast in a different way, do it in faith that God will honor your intentions.

There are many good reasons to participate in fasting. Below are three primary reasons for this 21-day partial fast.

1. Fasting gives you more time for prayer. You can use the time you'd normally spend preparing or waiting for food, and eating meals, as time in prayer for what God wants to do within and among us during this fast. In the Bible, fasting is always connected with prayer. Use this time to take a prayer walk, read the word, and pray scripture, or journal your prayers. "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So, after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." Acts 13:2-3
2. Fasting demonstrates the depth of our desire when praying for something. It shows we are serious enough about our prayer requests to pay a personal price God honors deep desire and praying in faith. "Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord." Joel 1:14 "Even now." Declares the Lord, "return to Me with all our heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Joel 2:12
3. Fasting releases God's supernatural power. It is a tool we can use when there is opposition to God's will. Satan would like nothing better than to cause division, discouragement, defeat, depression, and doubt among us. United prayer and fasting has always been used to deal decisive blows to the enemy! "So, we fasted and prayed about these concerns. And He listened." Ezra 8:23 "God says, "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to lose the chains of injustice and unite the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?" Isaiah 58:6

## 21 Minutes of Daily Bible Study

The Bible is God's love story to us from Genesis to Revelation. It talks about His good gifts, our rebellion and His promise of redemption through Jesus, but it can be a daunting text to tackle. That's why it requires study and meditation, and not just some of the time, but every single day. By deliberately spending time in Scripture over these 21 days, we can grow closer to the heart of God and what he requires of us in His Kingdom.

If you're new to Bible Study this can seem like a daunting task, but here are some suggestions to help you on your way.

- Read a Psalm each day starting with Psalm 1
- Read through Matthew 6
- Read Acts 10
- Read the passage as many times as it takes to fulfill the 21 minutes.
- Look for repeated words. Look for patterns in the text.
- Read slowly. Learn to digest the Word and not just read it because you're "supposed to".
- Journal insights as you're reading.

## 21 Minutes of Daily Prayer

Over these 21 days, we're encouraging you to dedicate 21 minutes each day to prayer. This can happen while you're denying yourself a meal or at any other time during the day.

Prayer is much more than just throwing our needs and requests at God (although it can be that). Prayer is sitting in relationship with our Heavenly Father through conversation.

Theologian Dallas Willard wrote, "The more we pray, the more we think to pray, and as we see the results of prayer - the responses of our Father to our requests- our confidence in God's power spills over into other areas of our life."

In other words, the more we seek God, the more we see Him move.

Prayer can seem overwhelming especially if you're new to the discipline. Here are some suggestions to help guide you.

- Start a prayer journal. Write down the things you want to bring before God and then let your heart cry to him. Make room for him to respond.
- Take a different day to pray for a different topic. Ex. Monday- Your Family, Tuesday- The Local Church and church leaders, Wednesday- The Nation and elected officials, etc.
- Pray the Scriptures. There is something powerful about speaking God's own words back to Him.
- Pray out loud. It may feel uncomfortable at first, but when we cry out to him with our lips, we mimic King David in Psalm 142:1-2 when he said, "I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble."

## Encouragement

Congratulations on making the decision to join us over these 21 days. It's not an easy decision, but it will be fulfilling. Practicing these three disciplines will teach us so much about ourselves and about God.

Over the next 21 days, pay attention to where you may be feeling weak during this journey. What has been exposed and made raw by having to deny yourself? Bring it before the Lord. Allow His grace to be sufficient for you. No amount of decadent food, fine wine, or even relationships, can fill and satisfy like the Spirit can.

Allow the Spirit to work from the inside out. Bring it all before Him. God will start to show Himself to us, like the sun coming out from behind the clouds. But you need to stick it out; remember your "why". James 4:10 says to "humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up." Isn't that what this time is all about? Humbling ourselves before the Lord; expecting and anticipating His movement in our lives and the lives of those we love. When we incorporate the disciplines of fasting, Bible reading, and prayer into our everyday lives, we will start to see God move like never before. And perhaps He's always been active, but when we add these practices, we are primed to SEE Him move.

## **Key Dates To Know About**

**21 Day Fast – January 22<sup>nd</sup> – February 11<sup>th</sup>**

<b>Prayer Nights – January 23<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>6:30pm</b>
<b>January 30<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>6:30pm</b>
<b>February 6<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>6:30pm</b>